

~~SECRET-SENSITIVE~~



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

10 April 1972

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

25X1A

MEMORANDUM FOR [REDACTED] CIA

SUBJECT: Assessment of Enemy Intentions in SVN Over the Next Three Months

I would like to suggest a topic for inclusion in the forthcoming assessment of enemy intentions that did not find its way into our earlier Indochina Ad Hoc Group paper of 31 March.

Specifically, it is the view that during this three-month period Hanoi not only is prepared to risk the resumption of US bombing against military targets in southern NVN (not Hanoi, Haiphong, etc.); but, indeed, may be deliberately trying to provoke just such attacks.

The argument to support this hypothesis is consistent with the thesis voiced in our earlier paper and other political assessments, e.g., that:

- Hanoi's military operations are undertaken primarily to achieve political objectives.
- Hanoi's major political objective is to influence the US electoral campaign and the US public, to include pressure groups in the US that seek a discontinuation of bombing in SEA.
- The resumption of US bombing may very probably restimulate earlier attempts in the US to curtail, or halt US bombing in SEA.
- Hanoi would be willing to accept the negative impacts of US bombing (destruction and/or damage to military ground targets and LOCs in NVN) in order to gain long term political effects that would achieve the following:
 - Political pressures and embarrassment to President Nixon.
 - Political dissension in the US, particularly by anti-war groups.
 - Possible US legislative measures restricting or curtailing bombing.
 - International headlines and support from other communist nations damaging to the US image and interests abroad.

OSD Declassification/Release Instructions on File

~~SECRET-SENSITIVE~~

~~SECRET-SENSITIVE~~

2

Since our 31 March assessment was submitted, the recent raid conducted near Vinh highlights US intentions to resume bombing of military targets in southern NVN. A sampling of recent public press statements (see attached) documents highlight what may become the emerging crescendo by the anti-war, halt-the-bombing advocates. In short, by giving cause for such public utterances as these, the view from Hanoi of an acceptable trade-off - limited short-term losses for potentially large long-term gains - gains a credibility that deserves mention in a discussion of enemy intentions.

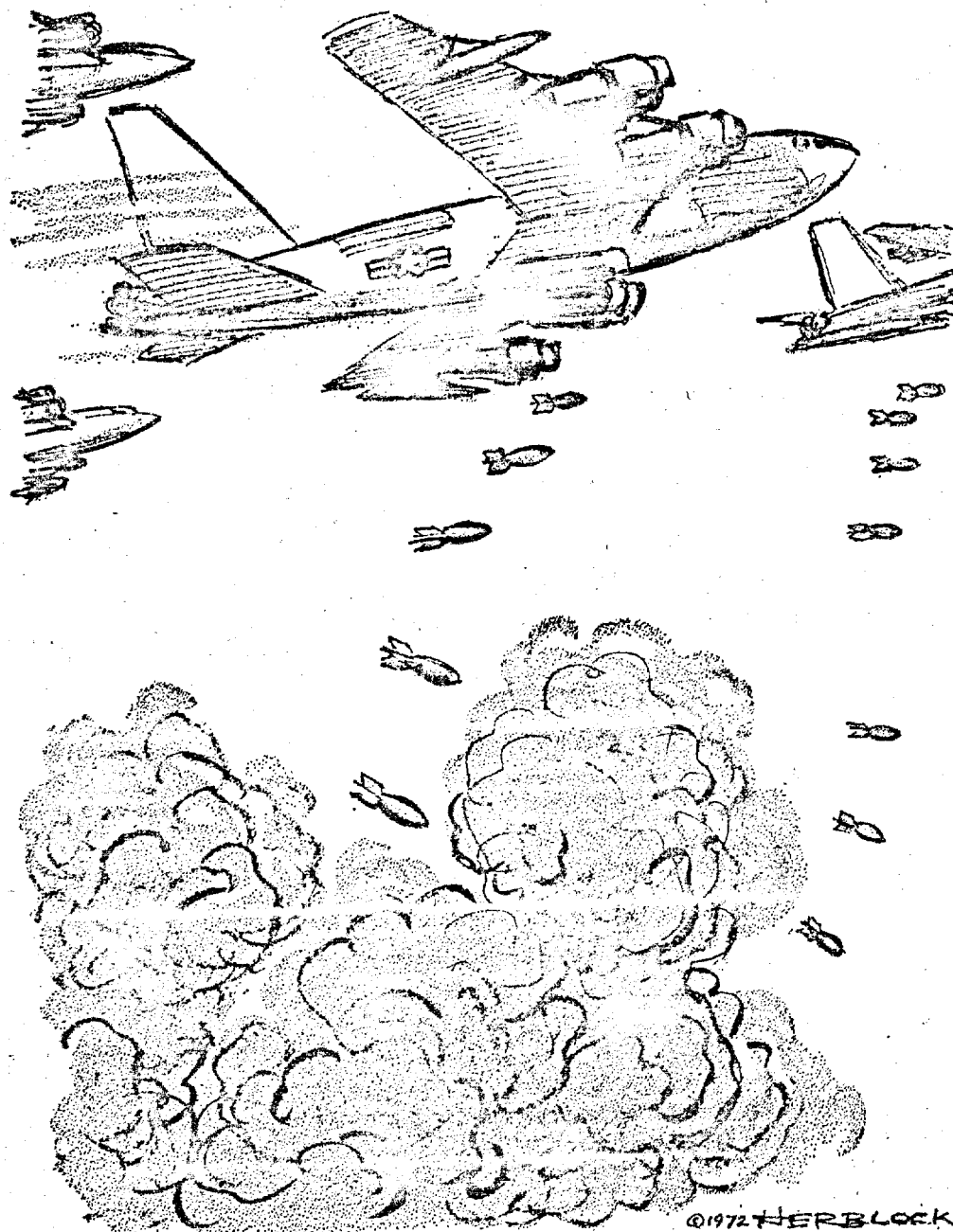
Attachments



FRED E. KARHOHS
Major General, USA
Director, Vietnam Task Force

~~SECRET-SENSITIVE~~

Fourth Year Of The "Plan To End The War"



The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 1972

PAGE B6

The Bombing

In his three years in the White House, Mr. Nixon has dropped more bombs by ton in Indochina, some three million tons, than Lyndon Johnson did in his five years. If you count the 500-pounders and the white phosphorous and the 7½-ton "Cheeseburgers" and all the rest, Mr. Nixon has dropped more than one ton of bombs per minute during every single minute of his administration. He has become—here's a "first" for you—the man who has assembled and let loose more devastation from the sky than anyone else in the history of creation; all this, mind you, while "winding down" the war.

Yet in the past week North Vietnam has been able to send some tens of thousands of troops, with heavy artillery and armor and antiaircraft and even SAMs, across the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam; it has an estimated 20,000 troops pushing off from the Cambodian border near Saigon; it is conducting other military operations in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere. Leaving aside the civilian and environmental damages, one is surely entitled to ask just what military purpose has been served by this torrentuous rain of explosives from the sky?

An obvious reply is, of course, that political constraints have prevented Mr. Nixon from bombing North Vietnam proper in the style to which his predecessor had become accustomed. Instead he has had to do most of his bombing elsewhere in Indochina, and he could not focus the daily devastation on the buildup above the DMZ. Yet the whole Johnson record indicates that although bombing raises Hanoi's costs, Hanoi is prepared to pay those costs. Even the heavy unconstrained bombing on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos has not kept North Vietnam from mustering the threat it now poses in Cambodia opposite Saigon and in the Delta.

Moreover, Mr. Nixon has done much bombing in North Vietnam. Though Mr. Johnson ended regular daily attacks on the North in 1968, sorties by the thousands have been authorized by Mr. Nixon in the name of "protective reaction" against Vietnamese efforts to track or down American planes

flying reconnaissance missions over the North and interdiction missions over Laos. Some of these "limited-duration protective-reaction strikes" have gone on for a week or more.

President Nixon's general bombing rationale, as restated by the American command in Saigon just the other day, has been "to help protect the lives of the diminishing United States forces in South Vietnam." Yet virtually none of the remaining Americans are in a combat role (except in the air or in a combat zone; their lives are *not* threatened. Asked on Thursday about the current raids, Admiral Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, candidly avoided the customary misleading bows to "protective reaction" and "protecting American boys." The bombing will continue, he said, "so long as the battle that is currently going is supported with resources from North Vietnam . . . as long as there are valid military targets supporting this operation." Defense Secretary Laird confirmed the point on Friday. For at least the span of "this operation," then, we are back essentially to the Johnson policy of regular daily attacks on North Vietnam. A record 500 tactical aircraft and a record 100 B-52s are on the job; a record fifth carrier is being readied to steam into the waters off Vietnam. The ranks of American POWs are again being increased.

In sum, having established himself as the greatest bomber of all time, having surpassed Lyndon Johnson in havoc wrought to the land if not also to the people of Indochina, having failed nonetheless to break the will of Hanoi or to deter its largest offensive since Dienbienphu, and having addicted Saigon more than ever to a reliance on American air power even while proclaiming ever greater success for "Vietnamization"—having done all this, Mr. Nixon is bombing still more, while the Russians, undeterred, are providing ever heavier firepower, in the form of artillery and SAM missiles, to their North Vietnamese allies. In what conceivable sense can this be described as "winding down"—let alone ending—the war?

33M

The Forgotten Victims

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, April 9—President Nixon's response to the Communist offensive in Vietnam, his escalation of air and naval bombardment, has special and agonizing meaning for one group of people: the wives and families of American prisoners.

More than anyone else, they must realize that the Nixon policy now offers no realistic hope of an end to American military involvement in Indochina. And in all likelihood that means no end to the captivity of their husbands, sons, brothers and fathers.

The feelings of the wives and families are likely to have political significance as the year 1972 goes on. Mr.

AT HOME ABROAD

"The United States has never disclosed having made any such proposal for an even exchange—total withdrawal in return for the prisoners—even in the secret talks."

Nixon, recognizing their potential as a focus of antiwar emotions, has taken great care with the families: his aides have cultivated them, and he himself made a surprise appearance at the last meeting of their organization. But resentment of the President—a feeling that he has defaulted on a pledge to get the men out—is now growing.

The President's credibility among the prisoners' families was falling before the latest military turn in Vietnam. An example of that trend can be seen in Mrs. Audrey Craner, whose husband, Lieut. Col. Robert Roger Craner, was shot down over North Vietnam on Dec. 20, 1967. She has had one brief letter from him and she does not know whether any of her letters to him has got through.

Mrs. Craner is English-born, and she struggles in a very English way to contain her anguish. She has not wanted her husband's plight to be caught up in politics; she has resisted those among the families who favor politicizing the prisoner issue. But now, painfully, her words are changing.

"Mr. Nixon keeps saying the war will not be an issue in the election," Mrs. Craner said a while ago, "but I can't believe that. He came in on a promise to end the war. He made clear in his last [January] speech how difficult that is, but he made the promise."

"I assume that Mr. Nixon means what he says when he says he will be responsible for the prisoners, so he must expect us to hold him responsible. If he gets those men out, I'll be glad to back him in the election. I'm sorry to be so selfish, but . . ."

Mrs. Craner appreciates the argument for continuing American effort to keep the Government of Nguyen Van Thieu in power in Saigon. She says that her husband is a career officer who understood the risk of war and would have thought his captivity a burden to be borne for the sake of American political objectives. But then she says: "That's what I believe he would have said five years ago, but now I don't know."

Others among the prisoners' families are much less cautious than Mrs. Craner, much more politically committed. An example in Washington, D. C., is Sheila Cronin, whose brother was shot down on Jan. 13, 1967. He is Navy Lieut. Comdr. Michael P. Cronin.

Miss Cronin and others are working in their spare time to put pressure on President Nixon by supporting candidates who would end the war and get the prisoners home. They expect to go to both national conventions.

"When the President spoke in January about the secret peace talks," Miss Cronin said, "we didn't understand a lot of things. We went to the White House and spoke with a staff man from the National Security Council. I asked him a lot of questions, and I didn't get a straight answer to a single one. At the end he told me that I should give their peace plan ten months—which would keep us quiet long enough to get Nixon re-elected."

One episode played a significant part in the politicizing of Sheila Cronin. That was what she calls the President's "misrepresentation of the facts" in his television interview with Dan Rather of C.B.S. last Jan. 2.

In that interview the President said flatly that the United States had offered the North Vietnamese "the deal of saying if we set a deadline" for total withdrawal, "then they will give us the prisoners." But, she said, the North Vietnamese, he said, had "totally rejected" this proposal—"a very cruel action on their part."

But that was fiction. The United States has never disclosed having made any such proposal for an even exchange—total withdrawal in return for the prisoners—even in the secret talks.

There is certainly no assurance that the other side would have accepted the idea. They might have last summer, before General Thieu's re-election; they might not. But there has never been any sign of willingness on Mr. Nixon's part to make such a deal, at least to date.

Even by our degraded standards of political truthfulness, such a calculated misrepresentation was, and is, staggering. The wives and families are not likely to forget it—or, if they have any access to the public conscience, to let the rest of us forget it.